



Cafe culture meets pioneering spirit

By Paul Charman

Their responsibilities force this couple to maximise each moment of creative time

Success in the arts demands a mountain of discipline and an ocean of energy.

So say an emerging painter and a well known classical and modern dance school operator, who also happen to be husband and wife.

They're Mount Maunganui identities Bryce and Catherine Brown, whose well-planned days begin with coffee and conversation at 6am and sometimes

conclude - for Catherine anyway - well into the early hours of the next morning.

This last eventuality is when a dance production is underway and Catherine is intent on having a quiet time to maintain creative flows at the end of a long and arduous day.

Within the mix of daily life the couple support, transport and exhort four children - aged from toddler to teenager - maintain a large organic vegetable garden, market and maintain their own respective businesses, plan and organise upcoming artistic events and festivals and lobby for tax reform on behalf of small business

people (who naturally include artists).

In conversation, far from showing signs of wear and tear, they are brimming with enthusiasm for the lifestyle they have chosen, claiming that working hard at what they love to do leads to a net energy gain, rather than a loss.

"Perhaps in some people's minds artists are wafty or ethereal types who go with the flow and await inspiration before doing any work," says Catherine.

Adds Bryce: "But the fact is you have to be disciplined if you are going to be an artist, look at Matisse, look at Picasso, or look at just about any of the successful

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Bryce Brown with one of the paintings from his latest collection, *Lightly on the Land*.

artists around Tauranga - and there are quite a few of those."

He quotes Leonardo da Vinci, to the effect that no work of any consequence is ever produced without constraints on the time of the artist.

The couple agree responsibilities force them to maximise each moment of creative time that comes their way.

When it comes to work stamina Bryce reckons that his wife's far exceeds his own and says her ability to move between the roles of work and domestic life helped to inspire his latest collection of paintings, *Lightly on the Land*.

Bryce is arrested by the female alchemy that lets a woman care for children, work the land, take care of business, plan for the future and then make herself beautiful to meet the world once again. He sees it all in Catherine.

The former carpet layer is no stranger to hard graft himself, having been able to do a small house in a single day before a hand injury forced him to look at a career

change a few years ago.

A graphics course at Bay of Plenty Polytechnic gave him the basic skills and confidence to launch out on a long-held dream of becoming a painter.

Bryce grew up on lifestyle blocks around Northland, working for local farmers in the school holidays, and has long been influenced by painters such as Mexican Diego Rivera, famed for his portrayal of the working class.

In little more than three years Bryce's figures - painted in a vibrant modernist style - have begun to attract an international following. One of his scenes of rural work was purchased by collectors working for the John Deere International fine art collection.

Bryce paints from home and is on hand when the older children arrive home from school.

The couple share the house work but Catherine takes sole charge of the garden, at present producing abundant cabbages, courgettes, tomatoes, cauliflowers and

herbs. Far from being a recreational interest it's a strategic move aimed at mitigating the cash flow problems affecting even successful artists. The organic garden also provides the healthy diet necessary to maintain a demanding lifestyle.

When the children were younger do-it-yourselfer Catherine used hot water from a chip heater in the back yard to wash some of the daily nappies required.

In professional life she operates The Dance House, which teaches classical ballet and the In Situ Dance Theatre Company, which takes youth on a performance journey, preparing them for stage and film work.

Catherine is proud of a family heritage that comprises artists and writers, dress makers and tradesmen.

"Our generation is one in which cafe culture meets pioneering spirit. Whether the next generation of Kiwi children can carry that on is something time alone will tell."